

## **Embodying Shared History: Narrative Inquiry as Pedagogy**

**By Sumer Seiki**

### **Overview**

This article describes my personal journey translating narrative inquiry research methods into pedagogy for my teacher education course. I use self-study research methods to frame my journey. Self-study is a widely used method in teacher education to reflectively improve one's practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). It provides the researcher a tool to look within, delving deeper into one's teaching context, motives, and actions. Using gained insights, one can then create the possibility for improvements. Dinkelman (2003) describes the process of self-study as:

[C]onfronting a puzzling situation; identifying a problem posed by that situation; forming a hypothesis about what might be done to solve that problem; considering the hypothesis by drawing on experiences, linking understanding, and combining ideas; and testing the hypothesis against the realization of desired ends. (p. 8)

These self-study steps are the format for my article; I use them to guide the reader along each stage of my investigation. Presenting personal research narratives to illustrate each stage, I also make shifts through time.

---

*Sumer Seiki is an  
assistant professor  
in the Department of  
Educational Studies  
at Illinois Wesleyan  
University, Bloomington,  
Illinois.*

This section foregrounds the steps of my process and maps it out. Beginning with the context, I share my research puzzle. Then I develop a hypothesis that leads me to examine my own learning of narrative inquiry. Drawing on my dissertation as a reference, I step back in time to Audrey, my research participant.

### ***Embodying Shared History***

---

Audrey shares her experiences from the often forgotten story of San Francisco Japantown gentrification. As I walk alongside her in the narratives and explore her many meanings, Audrey and narrative inquiry help me to redefine our lived histories as shared. This learning from narrative inquiry, through the process of going inward and outward, across time and space, is what I seek to bring into my course pedagogy.

In the second half of this article, I transition. I describe the ways I sought to use narrative inquiry as pedagogy in my new course to facilitate learning through narratives. Specifically, I share personal narratives from my course discussions, readings, films, and project assignments. Each element of the course serves to cultivate the narrative inquiry process for both teacher and students. In each reflection, I recount my progression with quotes from students. In the following section, I begin.

### **A New Course:A Puzzling Situation**

Sitting in my office chair, I stare at the gingko tree flapping its fan-shaped leaves outside my window. The tree reminds me of the gingko trees back home in San Francisco. The beauty of this tree calms me as I presently wrestle with constructing my new course. I am a faculty member in the department of education studies at a small Midwestern liberal arts university. I recently volunteered to teach an elective undergraduate preservice teacher course entitled *Cross-Cultural Studies for Teaching*.

Upright in my chair, I begin to design the course. I consider the course content I need to include and what learning needs to take place within my small class of ten preservice teachers. Many of the students I have known through other courses and academic advising. Prior to the course, I remember conversations in which some of these students share with me that they had little to no cross-cultural experiences growing up. Given this background knowledge, I consider my puzzle. What will help these preservice teachers be able to teach cross-culturally?

I decide one course objective must be to help my preservice teachers personally understand their differences and commonalities with their students. Specifically, the ways larger macro-level forces like global economics, politics, and national institutional systems and structures push and pull in their lives and the lives of their K-12 students and families (Watson-Gegeo, 1992). Macro levels “frame, inform and constrain” the micro-level personal history, values, ideologies, and epistemology (Watson-Gegeo, 1992, p. 52). In order for my preservice teachers to be able to teach cross-culturally and linguistically, I want them to understand their own history and be able to skillfully enter into their students’ worlds so learning can occur.

Ready with my solution to this puzzle, I sit upright at my desk thinking about how to teach this skill. I reflect. Drawing on my own learning process, I remember Audrey.

## **Learning from Past experiences: Narrative Inquiry Research Reflections**

Audrey, one of my dissertation research participants, is a native San Franciscan K-8 educator for over 30 years (Seiki, 2011). Audrey is particularly memorable and shares the little-known story of Japantown “redevelopment.” Growing up in the close-knit post-World War II Japantown community, she knew many of the families because they had grown close during imprisonment. In fact, she knows my father, who also lived along the Victorian-lined streets of this neighborhood. During the dissertation interview, I asked Audrey about her past.

“You grew up in Japantown [1950’s post World War II]?

Audrey replies, “Right. Yes, I used to walk to Bell [Middle School] and there was nothing where Japantown is now. Literally nothing, it was bombed out. They razed all those buildings. It must have been three, four, or five years [and] there was literally nothing on that land. They kicked everybody out. I mean it’s terrible, you know. They kicked everybody out and everybody lost their houses. They didn’t do anything with that land. No, they really wanted to cleanse the neighborhood. I believe that’s what really happened. Because when we were living in Japantown, your father can probably say the same thing, there were lots of African Americans and a lot of Japanese. I mean Bell [Middle School] was a bumblebee<sup>1</sup> school. They just wiped out all that housing. Well, you know those people had to move someplace; they moved. A lot of Japanese I think moved to the avenues [suburban area].”

Later in the conversation, I mention that I never knew this and realize I was not fully connected to my own family stories.

Audrey replies, “Yes, because you know Geary Boulevard is a throughway. So that whole area was just wiped out. You can ask your Dad about this.”

I reply, “So those use to be houses [where Geary Boulevard is now]?”

Audrey states, “Yes. If you go to Bell and O’Farrell streets, right across from Bell Middle School there are houses that they actually physically moved there. I don’t know where they moved them from, but those were the kind of houses that were around Geary and Post [streets]. There’s a ton of places there that you don’t see, old Victorian-type places there. They were all wiped out.”

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Listening to Audrey’s story of redevelopment, I remember the next stage of my narrative process, exploring narrative inquiry. Narrative Inquiry considers

Story, in the current idiom, [is] a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

Narrative inquirers explore experience through three specific dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place, which serve as a conceptual framework (Clandinin

### ***Embodying Shared History***

---

& Huber, 2010). Questioning, wondering and traversing along these dimensions narrative inquirers shift forward and back in the dimensions of time, personal situations and the larger social influences seeking to more fully understand each other's lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explain that "the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (p. 42-43). As a child living in Japantown, Audrey lived on a storied landscape composed by the social, cultural, and institutional narratives surrounding Japanese Americans. These larger social narratives are also part of the still-unfolding story of Japantown redevelopment. Using these narrative inquiry methods in the next section, I make links between larger social narratives and the personal lived experiences of Audrey.

### **Three-Dimensional Inquiry: Exploring Temporality, Sociality and Place**

A real turning point came in my understanding when I looked into the three dimensions of Audrey's narrative. I remember investigating the social narrative through the macro level political and societal contexts of the day. I read the document entitled *San Francisco Japantown: Historic Context Statement* (Grave, 2009).

Author Donna Grave describes that the first wave of redevelopment, stage A-1, which demolished "twenty-seven blocks including much of Japantown south of Post Street" (p. 56). This is the same area that Audrey describes "was slated to be razed" (Seiki, 2011). The San Francisco Redevelopment Authority's (SFRA) goal was to raze this poor, non-European area to construct a throughway [Geary Boulevard] that diminished the power of the neighborhood community by reducing housing and infrastructure (Grave, 2009, p. 53). SFRA's redevelopment was "a suitable plan that will prevent the Japanese district from turning into the worst slum in the history of the city" (Grave, 2009, p. 53).

Exploring Audrey's narrative alongside the historic context statement, I see Audrey is situated on a landscape shaped by hierarchical plotlines. When analyzing Audrey's description of the destruction of her neighborhood through all three dimensions of the narrative inquiry space, it becomes evident that what she described was significantly more than the physical demolition. For example, it resulted in financial ruin for many of the small businesses and residents, in large part because "the SFRA had a strategy for driving their purchase prices down" (Grave, 2009, p. 56). For example, "Vernon Thornton's thriving bowling alley on Fillmore Street lost its clientele as buildings around it fell to the wrecking ball. By the time the SFRA made an offer on his property, Thornton calculated that he received a fraction of its former worth" (p. 56). Moreover, the demolition of the neighborhood had serious social impacts, as "eight thousand residents were evicted by the A-1

### *Sumer Seiki*

---

phase of the redevelopment, displacing the neighborhood's multi-ethnic populous without a comprehensive plan for finding new homes" (p. 56).

Audrey's comments about "cleans[ing] the neighborhood" and that "they kicked everybody out and everybody lost their houses" (research conversation, February 26, 2010) situated her family's personal experience within the context of the eight thousand people evicted from the area. Grave reminds us, "the number of Nikkei [second-generation Japanese American] dropped from 5,383 to 3,914 in the same decade" (p. 57). This is evidence of the success of the SFRA policies, which reinforces Audrey's statement that the goal was "cleansing" the neighborhood.

Moreover, I understand Audrey's reference when she notes, "they demolished them." Audrey is speaking about the destruction and loss of homes. Audrey's neighborhood, her community, and her family, were targeted as Americans of Japanese descent. The SFRA initiative in her neighborhood occurred at a time when support for and tolerance of Japanese Americans was at an all-time low (Chan, 1991). By placing Audrey's comments within a temporal and societal context, I became aware of and understand her feeling of injustice as her entire community experienced racial exclusion over generations. In fact, these local San Francisco redevelopment policies made "legal restrictions [and] underlying racism, [which] shaped the lives of Japanese immigrants and their descendants" (Grave, 2009, p. 25). SFRA local policies were in keeping with larger national narrative of Japanese Americans as suspicious perpetual foreigners (Chan, 1991). Both are part of the longer history of discrimination and exploitation of Asians within the United States (Chan, 1991).

### **Pulling in Past Patterns of Displacement**

Audrey's family narratives make me consider the personal costs suffered under policies informed by discrimination, city planning imbued with exclusion, and gentrification. The resulting experiences of restriction, dehumanization, and cruelty, combined with a need to endure bear similarity to the stories of Japanese internment. In examining the social context of Audrey's narratives, I see the ways Japanese American imprisonment during World War II was part of the larger United States social narrative. Presidential Executive Order 9066 removed 120,000 American Japanese and immigrant Japanese from their homes and placed them in prison camps (Chan, 1991). Many Japanese Americans "were given extremely short notice by the War Relocation Authority, typically less than a month; this made it impossible for the evacuated Japanese Americans to sell their homes, business, and other property at a fair price" (Daniels, Taylor, & Kitano, 1991). Audrey's parents too were forcibly taken from their homes because of fear that they were allied to Japan. Ironically, the largest population imprisoned was children.

After the war, many in the community returned to their homes in Japantown only to find they were occupied. Many had little money and were forced to rent rooms in the neighborhoods they once called home. This larger social narrative co-composed

### *Embodying Shared History*

---

Audrey and her Japantown community. Flush with federal dollars, SFRA informed Audrey and her family that the neighborhood was to be physically destroyed, made possible because of the eminent domain clause. Audrey observed the destruction of her home and community and likened it to a war zone. I understand therefore that Audrey's experiences were similar to those of her parent's generation because the San Francisco Japanese American community of Japantown was fragmented a second time after World War II imprisonment. Yet unlike her parents' return from imprisonment, Audrey had no chance of returning home. An inner-city throughway, Geary Boulevard, was built where many of her friends and community lived.

Audrey's narrative and the process of narrative inquiry helped me understand the magnitude of displacement occurring for a second time after Japanese American imprisonment. This powerful learning allowed me to examine and connect the larger national social policies of exclusion of citizenship, forced relocation, and even imprisonment. These series of national and state policies created a hostile macroclimate, also emulated in SFRA's city plan. Audrey reminds me of the longitudinal costs of exclusion. She shares the types of progress that were made in the city but also reveals the silent costs of redevelopment in her own life, the lives of the community, and the relationships that were once so strong. In turn, Audrey devoted her professional life and energy to pushing back at the exclusionary borders of belonging for students at Bell Middle School, the place at which she taught and was later principal for over twenty years. She was an educator in a place she once called home. Audrey created her own reverberations through the students, school, and streets of what remains of the fragments of Japantown south of Post Street.

### **Relationally Intertwined Inquiry**

During the research conversations, Audrey pulls me into her own narrative and places my family alongside her own when she refers multiple times to my father and reminds me of his place in these neighborhood and community experiences. Because the narrative inquiry research process requires me to consider my own family and career-life story in tandem with Audrey's, I cannot be an objective or distant researcher solely examining my participants; I must also inquire into my own story. Clandinin (2006) writes, "Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experience developed through the relational inquiry process" (p. 47). Each of our lives is intertwined on this storied landscape. Audrey invites me to co-construct alongside her and directs me to my father.

Older than Audrey, he also lived in the same San Francisco Japantown neighborhood and also attended Bell Middle School. Audrey's parents and my grandparents knew of each other within this community. Like Audrey, my father also entrusted me with stories of redevelopment as a child. However, my childhood understanding

*Sumer Seiki*

---

was limited, and I did not retain the details of the SFRA, nor did I fully understand the ways that the larger narrative of city planning and policy intertwined with my life and family. I was naive as to the ways the SFRA reflected the larger social narrative of the time. Conversations with Audrey and my father, combined with the process of narrative inquiry, began to awaken me to larger systems at work in my own life.

**Personal Inquiry: Living Alongside**

In inquiring into my own story, I also hear and feel the reverberations as I walk the streets of Japantown where our family hardware store used to stand. I feel at home where my grandfather and father worked in the community and land. However, now I see the closing storefronts and changes in this tiny community. The peace plaza, a local mall that was constructed as part of redevelopment, now has several closed shops, and on the other side a few elderly Japanese Americans and mostly tourists roam. A once-vibrant community is disappearing, and I think deeply about the cost of redevelopment gentrification to the future generations. As a Yonsei, fourth-generation American Japanese, I consider the long-term costs of redevelopment and segregation and the ways we are shaped by the larger patterns within society and power dynamics over generations. I wonder why access to these stories of redevelopment is limited. Perhaps that sense of silence and disregard for these stories reflects societal values surrounding the history of internment and an intentional forgetting.

The loss of the community buildings in Japantown, the physical structures, meant emotional loss in the places that were once homes. In addition, with many community members migrating to the suburbs, relocation fractured the Japanese American community, the intended goal of the SFRA redevelopment (Grave, 2009). The social space of solidarity was physically razed and inflicted psychological and relational aftershocks that have affected subsequent generations, especially in my life. I did not live in Japantown growing up because my grandfather's building was possessed due to SFRA's eminent domain. My grandfather moved our family out of Japantown.

Had redevelopment not occurred in our community, what might have been? I feel a sense of having lost families I could have known and the comfort of belonging that my father and Audrey lived, which I know only know through their stories. At times when I sense this loss of community, I walk up to Benkyo-do, a tiny corner confectionary shop and order a pink monju. Then I walk up to what remains of Uoki K Sakai grocery store on 1656 Post Street remembering I was always greeted there with, "Oh you are you related to the Hardware store?" "Yes," I always say, "my family used to live here." The sorrow of the loss of this once vibrant and dynamic community is no longer just Audrey's story, it is also one I carry within me now. One we work to change together.

---

## *Embodying Shared History*

---

### **Transitioning Research Methods into Pedagogy**

Returning back to the fluttering leaves of the gingko and the task of course design. I realize I relationally learned historic facts, making abstract timelines and census data vital parts of understanding Audrey's narrative.

This inward and outward process of understanding the larger economic and political impact to our personal lives is what I want to bring to my new cross-cultural teaching course. I knew I could not teach about San Francisco Japantown since it could be perceived as an abstract historical fact in a distant city that had little relation to my students. I had to find a topic to teach that was relevant and personal to my students and their families in the same ways that learning about Japantown was personal to me.

In researching texts, I found *The Line Between Us: Teaching About the Border and Mexican Immigration* (Bigelow, 2006). Written by teacher Bill Bigelow, a *Rethinking Education* book, recounts the ways he learns how the North American Federal Trade Agreement (NAFTA) impacted Tijuana, Mexico. He traces his journey in Tijuana and discusses the human and environmental impact of NAFTA through personal reflection, local Tijuana interview narratives, facts, and lesson plans he used to teach his students about the tensions influencing Mexican immigration into the United States. Since Mexican Americans are one of the larger populations in our local school districts, I found these stories particularly relevant for my preservice teachers. Many of my students enrolled in the course are placed in our local school districts. Thus, making this population one that is personally relevant.

Excited to find this text, I know this is a tool I can use to teach the ways that our national policy impacts immigration and communities in neighboring nations. Additionally, since many of my students are from corn-producing states and fields of monocrop genetically engineered corn surround our university, NAFTA's sanctioned U.S. corn exports to Mexico was a personally relevant topic to my students, their families, and the cities and states in which they were raised. I know with this text that they can learn from Bill Bigelow's personal story, similar to the way I learned from Audrey. I also know that using more stories told through film can make this learning personal since film provides visual and personal connection. I use two films in class that focus on children's border crossing, one of which I will discuss in a later section.

Through this processing and designing, I employ narrative inquiry as pedagogy. I use Bill Bigelow's personal stories from *The Line Between Us* and examine the three-dimensional space of the stories. Although I am not in a relationship with Bigelow, a required part of narrative inquiry, I do have a relationship with my students. Narrative inquiry as pedagogy takes place through my relationship with the students and alongside Bigelow's the stories. As I share about my own life and from Audrey's stories.

In the following section, I describe a class period in which we use the text, film, and discussion to understand the larger societal level forces of NAFTA impacting

---

*Sumer Seiki*

---

my preservice teachers lives and the lives of their students. My goal is to have preservice teachers to be able to politically and economically connect the larger societal narratives to their own life and their students.

### **Inroads and Impacts: A Class Discussion**

In class we discuss *The Line Between Us*. Sitting in two rows, students face the projected PowerPoint image of *teosinte*, an ancient progenitor of corn found in Mexico. We review the local varieties cultivated in Mexico for many generations, since Mexico is home to the largest genetic diversity of corn in the world. Using the text, we discuss the ways NAFTA impacts Mexican farmers and corn diversity. We specifically consider how the price of United States corn from Midwestern farms out-competes local Mexican farmer's corn prices. Because they could no longer compete in the corn market, Mexican farm families who grew local corn varieties were driven off the land some had farmed for generations.

Annie, a student, raises her hand. With a confused look she says in earnest, "I don't understand how corn and NAFTA work? I don't get it. Can you explain it?" I explain that in the Midwest, in fact right where our university is located, vast monocrops of engineered corn are grown and are sold for cheap.

She interrupts me and says, "Oh, the Mexican tariffs can't keep the Mexican corn prices lower anymore because of NAFTA. The Mexican corn used to be priced lower before NAFTA but now United States corn is cheaper than Mexican corn. People are buying United States corn over Mexican corn in Mexico. So the Mexican corn farmers are not getting enough money from the corn they're growing. I never knew this! I don't understand—I thought Clinton was the good president," she says, shaking her head in confusion.

I say, "It's the quality of your legacy that determines if you are good or bad, let's look at the aftermath of NAFTA." Annie shakes her head again and says with regret, "I never knew this. I never knew this."

Understanding the impacts of NAFTA more fully, the students understand why families are migrating to our Midwestern city and into the United States in search of jobs to support their kin. They also understand the consequences of the loss of genetic diversity, reverberations of NAFTA. They also come to realize that as a city and state in the corn belt, we have benefited from NAFTA. We are a part of this national policy. After reading the book and having numerous discussions over several weeks, the preservice teachers start to ask questions and connect more personally with some of the Mexican immigrant students they are teaching. They ask questions about the push and pull factors acting in their students' lives and connect them with their own; they awaken to the economic and political interconnectivity of all our lives.

To show more stories on the landscape, we watch the film *Which Way Home* in class. Film director Rebecca Cammisa documents unaccompanied children border-

---

### ***Embodying Shared History***

---

crossing through Mexico. Cammisa traces a number of children, leaving at young ages, as they attempt to cross the border on the tops of trains. They search to be with their beloved parents, become adopted, or to find work in large cities to support their family. Along the way, these courageous children reveal their naiveté about the world and are caught in hard and often cruel circumstances. The documentary film reveals these immigration complexities and helps my students consider how children's personal border-crossing experiences are tied to the larger United States policies, including NAFTA.

One student says shortly into the film, "This is sad, professor. I'm crying already and we are only five minutes into the movie." I say, "Yes, I cried watching it." Over the course of the movie, I sit and watched my students' eyes fill with tears, their mouths open in shock, and their heads shake in disgust and anger. The pain of watching the movie with my students a second time is just as hard as watching it the first time alone. But I am reminded that they and I need to know who is in our nation's classrooms and why some of the children come to the United States. We need to know their families and their experiences juxtaposed to larger policy. We must face the uncomfortable truth of our own nation's role in creating hardship and open our eyes to the fullness of the children's stories. We must not use our privilege to turn off the movie and silence these stories because of our discomfort. In fact, we need to learn to understand more deeply through relationship. Narrative inquiry as pedagogy requires my students and I to learn alongside one another and the students in our K-12 classrooms; in relationship we inquire into our collective stories. Facing the reality of these diverse stories, in becoming cognizant of our own responsibilities, we can then understand how and where we can be agents of change to improve students' lives in our macro social narrative.

Finally, we read the pedagogy of *Acompañamiento*. In groups of four, we read about Enrique Sepulveda (2011), a teacher researcher walking alongside his students and helping them create a collective witness to one another in his class. Through poems, his students recount their border crossing and identity negotiation. I write on a couple of poems on the board:

To be abandoned is to be nobody; to be accompanied is to be honored, a person. The people's accompaniment symbolizes a new honored status as a full human being.

—R. S. Goizueta

The second anonymous poem states,

I recall my homeland,  
I contemplate the land where I am,  
I remember my life in my homeland,  
And I think I end up forgetting who I am. (Sepulveda, 2011, p. 563)

After reading the poems and discussing the course content, a student looks at me. Her face shows deep consideration of what she learned about NAFTA, the border, the film *Which Way Home*, and her students' lives. She breaks our eye contact and

### *Sumer Seiki*

---

looks across the room. Then says, “What if my students have more [difficult] life experience than me, and I’m their teacher? What do I do?” I reply, “Yes, many of my students had more [difficult] life experience than me, and they were in fourth grade [in an urban school].”

Narrative inquiry as pedagogy requires us to learn awareness that our own stories and experiences will also bump up with, and perhaps stand at odds with, the stories and experiences of our students. Yet as Goizuela writes, to be accompanied is to be honored, a person. In being a witness to the lives and diversity of these stories, these preservice teachers are holding the narrative inquiry posture of curious witness. They are realizing how their lives interconnect with one another and learning to lay their stories alongside one another to examine temporality, sociality, and place. They are also coming to understand that being a witness alone is not sufficient. Narrative inquiry requires them to live these experiences, to relive them, and to embody them.

### **Applying Inquiry Skills to New Situations**

Sliding back in time to course planning in my office, I remember thinking about teaching through course assignments. I want to help preservice teachers not only understand the complex political and economic forces impacting the lives of their students. I also want them to have the skill of applying this knowledge to new situations.

I ponder times when I was able to apply this skill, and then a recent memory comes forward. In early October 2012, I was just finishing my faculty observation of a third grade Spanish bilingual class in the Midwest. Having observed in the class for a few months, I wanted to bring the students a treat for their *Día de los Muertos* celebration, a Mexican holiday honoring family ancestors. Considering where I could get candy skulls, I remembered many were sold in the Mission District back home in San Francisco. Since I was planning a trip back to San Francisco that month, I was excited to be able to return with candy before the class celebration.

In San Francisco, I parked my car and walked the streets of The Mission in search of candy skulls. I had gone to elementary school in this district and was familiar with some of the shops. I thought there would be skulls for sale since it was right before the holiday: when I was a child, many stores sold them for reasonable prices. As I walked the streets of the Mission District, childhood memories flooded back to me. I remembered Sunday mornings spent picking up burritos for my father and seeing the many diverse Latina/o families walk to church, little girls adorned in beautiful dresses and the boys in pressed pants and shirts.

As I continued to walk through The Mission this October Sunday, I noticed only one family pass me. I saw only one little girl in a dress. Finding it a little peculiar that I wasn’t seeing more families, I began to consider why. I walked up and down the mission searching for the candy skulls, and each storefront had either changed

### ***Embodying Shared History***

---

or no longer carried them. Trendy restaurants and hipsters were the norm. Once full of Latina/o families and stores, The Mission had changed. Wealthy computer-industry workers filled the district.

Concerns about the loss of the families filled me, and I wondered if this gentrification was for the better. Would the same loss I experienced with the redevelopment of Japantown happen to future generations of the Latina/o community? Where did the Latina/o families move? Continuing my search for the candy skulls and asking local curio shop owners, I finally found a store that sold the candy skulls, but they were high-priced items. I could afford to bring back only one skull to the students.

My recent search in the Mission District and my assessment of its changes was informed by Audrey's narrative and the narrative inquiry process. Once the understanding of larger societal forces in Audrey's and my own life became personal, I knew that I too could translate this learning process to my own students. I could take my family story and lay it alongside theirs so that, as Audrey did for me, I could position their lives alongside mine in larger social narratives. And in doing so, I equip my preservice teachers to do the same with their own students: a process of translation that works cross-nationally and across time, space, and place in relational learning with their students.

Since I could successfully transfer my narrative inquiry investigation into a new situation, I knew that I could teach my preservice teachers to do the same. My resulting assignment requires them to reincorporate their NAFTA content learning into their own lives through a personal family history project, paraphrased below:

#### **Generational Heritage Movie Project**

To understand the lived and generational impacts of United States policy, political climate, and social positioning in your own life, you will make a movie documenting the ways your own family heritage language and cultural practices changed within and across generations. Beginning with immigration, you will investigate the era in which your family immigrated. Describe the larger societal-level push and pull factors causing your family to leave their homeland. Document the social climate in the United States when they first arrived. Next, explore the generational changes in heritage language loss or maintenance while living in the United States. Provide the historical backdrop of each generation as they change jobs and move. Include relevant education policies and the subsequent impacts on language usage. I will share an example of my own family history but please use this as an idea and not as a template for your own movie. Your project should be unique, creative, and thoughtfully integrate history, the content of the course, and your family's experience.

As I write the assignment, I realize that Audrey and narrative inquiry helped me lay out the specific policies and impacts on my own family's life for generations. Upon writing the assignment description, I create a timeline draft of the larger social policies impacting my family and the ways that each policy impacted each genera-

### *Sumer Seiki*

---

tion: my great grandfather, my grandfather, my father, and my own life. I document their agency in response to these larger social narratives. I prepare this document to use as a sample of how and what policies impact each generation in my family. If preservice teachers investigate the ways macro-level forces and societal narratives impact their own family and lives, they can make this learning personal enough to apply it to other situations. Perhaps they can also see the ways their families used their agency in response to the social narratives as Audrey and my family did. They can practice this skill to carry it forward into their own classrooms.

Through a preparatory movie lesson, I present to the class my family history timeline. I share with them push factors influencing my great grandfather's immigration and pull factors causing his emigration to the United States. I share family stories about language barriers, marriage, and discrimination. Through stories and questions our class cultivates relationships, they connect to my great grandfather's story and the larger United States social narratives on race personally. They learn about the larger anti-Japanese national policies of exclusion through the Gentleman's Agreement, *Ozawa v. United States*, and American Japanese imprisonment during WWII. They hear my grandfather's strength and my father's resilience despite being imprisoned during WWII. They see photos of my family. As I had learned through Audrey, they learn through me about the ways personal agency presses up against the grand narrative enacted through national, state, and city planning policies. After that class session, they understand the assignment and know they too would lay their own family's immigration story to the United States alongside mine.

### **Movie Project Viewings**

On the first movie début night, the students again sit in two horizontal rows facing the screen. Four students upload their films. Excited, I sit in the back when the movies begin. The students are nervous. The first student, Laura, plays her movie that reveals a complex story of generational Spanish-heritage language maintenance within the Mexican family side and heritage language loss within the Italian family side. Told through a collage of narration, family photos, and images, Laura's story characterizes the periods of migration and explains the political and social policies and climates in which the family entered the United States. She presents the impact that the political climate had on her family's cultural and language maintenance. Laura's story is also carefully reinforced through statistical charts. It is mesmerizing.

The next movies plays, and we see another creative and well-considered story of immigration and generational change through ship manifests, artwork, and more family photos. Each student that night describes the forces and influences of immigration and the generational cultural changes over time. Each story is unique and helps all of us to better understand one another through our family immigration and language change stories. Many of the same policies impacted their families and stories of resourcefulness and agency abound.

### ***Embodying Shared History***

---

Towards the end of the night, through our story sharing, the classroom feels smaller because we are all closer; we know where we each came from. We understand complex factors in our own family's life that led our ancestors to immigrate to the United States. The complexities of life are shared through the stories. But the simple one-dimensional story of immigrant families is translated through narrative inquiry and becomes three-dimensional. Each story was living and became embodied by our class. As the last movie of the evening plays, we learn about a farming family's immigration from Europe to the United States. This European family's farm was dear to them, and when they immigrate to the United States, a sense of loss was felt. In response to this loss, this family changed their last name to the name of their hometown so that subsequent generations would always remember where they came from. The agency of this family was to claim a part of the land they were leaving. This story made real for me the concept of agency in the face of upheaval within each immigrant family.

Over the two and a half class periods of heritage movies, I watch students ask fellow movie presenter's personal questions about Whiteness, race, class, and the complexities of immigration and cross-cultural experiences within their families. The relationships they build with one another create strong personal bonds and the trust to risk asking unspoken questions. The students more fully understand the lived experiences of the macro social narrative impacting Native Americans, East Indians, Europeans, and African slave forefathers. They learn about the generational costs of macro-level policies. The students became the teachers, and frank questions elicit humorous and thoughtful responses in which a new mode of personal learning occurs.

Narrative inquiry as pedagogy is apparent in the relational learning within the classroom. The students listening to my family stories and each other's were witnesses to the both similar and diverse stories of immigration. The students inquire into their own story alongside each other's and together we come to a deeper understanding. We see in those movies we are truly a nation of immigrants. Through retelling together the larger social and economic policies impacting all our families we are able to begin to imagine reliving a new story with our students.

At the end of class that night, as the students are packing up to leave, Shelly turns and asks me, "So what are we going to do now?" I said, "I hope you show your movie to your own students one day, and ask them to make one of their own." Shelly laughs in response.

### **Final Wondering**

Back at my desk, I sit near the gingko tree again. The semester class has ended and summer has begun. This fall, some of my cross-cultural teaching students will begin teaching in their own elementary school classrooms. Large transitions are ahead for them and the new worlds they will enter.

### *Sumer Seiki*

---

I wonder now what Shelly's laugh meant. From the conversations in class, and collection of my personal reflective narratives, it appears students are able to use narrative inquiry as pedagogy. Relationally learning from the readings, film, and each other, preservice teachers can better understand the larger contexts in which we all function. Their risks in being vulnerable, in making deep three-dimensional connections, and thoughtfully engaging in difficult questions indicate that they embodied our shared class histories.

However, it remains unclear if will be lasting. Only time will tell, in their practice. I continue to wonder if in the fall Shelly will engage with the students and families differently knowing we each have a unique story impacted by these larger social, political, and economic forces. I wonder what will come next for these preservice teachers as the recent wars impact new students migrate in to the United States. The impacts of NAFTA continue. I wonder what will my students do in the states, communities, districts, and schools they will live and work. Will they be agents of resistance and change like Audrey? Will they be witness to the fullness of the stories, even the uncomfortable ones? Will they use their agency and energy to resist the realities of injustice? Will they work alongside the families and students as they teach?

I also think of Audrey again and wonder if she knows the impact she had on my learning and the ways it has sprouted, grown, and spread since then. Perhaps the seeds of understanding and agency will grow strong.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup> Bumblebee is in reference to racial groups. The two groups mentioned in the interview transcript were Japanese Americans, who were once labeled as a part of the "yellow" race, and African Americans as part of the "black" race. Hence, the "yellow" and "black" in combination refer to the colored stripes of a bumblebee.

### **References**

- Bigelow, B. (2006). *The line between us: Teaching about the border and Mexican immigration*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Bullough, R.V. Jr., & Pinnegar, S. (2001). Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), 13-21.
- Chan, S. (1991). *Asian Americans: An interpretive history*. Detroit, MI: Twayne Publishers.
- Clandinin D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 27(1), 44-54.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Clandinin D. J., & Huber, J. (2010). Narrative inquiry. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, & P. Peterson (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (pp. 436-441). New York: Elsevier.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of Narrative Inquiry borderlands spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry* (pp. 35-76). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### ***Embodying Shared History***

---

- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 375-385). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Daniels, R., Taylor, S. C., & Kitano, H. H. L. (Eds.). (1991). *Japanese Americans from relocation to redress*. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press.
- Dinkelman, T. (2003). Self-study in teacher education: A means and ends tool for promoting reflective teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54(1), 6-18.
- Grave, D. (2009). *San Francisco Japantown historic context statement*. Retrieved from <http://www.sf-planning.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=1696>
- Seiki, S. (2011). The formidable: Asian American educators from the San Francisco Bay Area. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Davis.
- Sepulveda, E. (2011). Toward a pedagogy of Acompañamiento: Mexican migrant youth writing from the underside of modernity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(3), 550-572.
- Watson Gegeo, K. A. (1992). Thick explanation in the ethnographic study of child socialization and development: A longitudinal study of the problem of schooling for Kwara'ae (Solomon Islands) children. In W. A. Corsaro & P. J. Miller (Eds.), *Interpretive approaches to child socialization: New directions for child development* (No. 58) (pp. 51-66). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.